

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims will replace all prior version, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-10 (canceled)

Claim 11 (withdrawn) A tensioning mechanism for drawing a pair of spaced-apart vertically disposed clothing straps toward each other, comprising:

a first elastic member directly fastened to a first one of said clothing straps;  
a second elastic member directly fastened to a second one of said clothing straps;

and

means integrated into said first and second elastic members for enabling releasable attachment of said elastic members to each other,

wherein, upon fastening said first and second elastic members to each other the vertically disposed clothing straps are drawn toward each other medially.

Claim 12 (withdrawn) A tensioning device as recited in claim 11, wherein:  
said first elastic member has a portion fastened to the first one of said clothing straps and an unfastened flap portion extending therefrom; and  
said second elastic member has a portion fastened to the second one of said clothing straps and an unfastened flap portion extending therefrom.

Claim 13 (withdrawn) A tensioning device as recited in claim 12, wherein said releasable attachment means further comprises:

at least one snap member integrated into the unfastened flap portion of the first one of said clothing straps; and

at least one mating snap member integrated into the unfastened free portion of the second one of said clothing straps.

Claim 14 (withdrawn) A tensioning device as recited in claim 12, wherein said releasable attachment means further comprises:

one half of a hook-and-loop type fastening system integrated into the unfastened flap portion of the first one of said clothing straps; and

the other half of said hook-and-loop fastening system integrated into the unfastened flap portion of the second one of said clothing straps.

Claim 15 (withdrawn) A unitary tensioning member for drawing a pair of spaced-apart vertically disposed clothing straps toward each other, comprising:

a planar rear wall portion;

left and right planar front wall portions disposed in a common plane and parallel to said rear wall portion; and

a pair of side wall portions adjoining the respective left and right front wall portions to opposite ends of the rear wall portion;

said left and right front wall portions terminating at respective edges defining a strap-receiving opening therebetween; and,  
said rear, front and side wall portions together defining a strap retaining slot sized and shaped for simultaneously retaining said pair of clothing straps in a tensioned condition while preventing twisting of said straps.

Claim 16 (new) A clothing strap tensioning device, comprising:

an elastic member having a geometry generally defined by middle, left end, and right end portions, and bounded by upper, lower, left and right edges;

means integrated into the left end and right end portions for enabling releasable attachment of the end portions to each other to form the elastic member into a loop; and

said left and right end portion of the elastic member projecting upwardly away from said middle portion,

wherein, upon securing the tensioning device about the spaced-apart clothing straps, the clothing straps are drawn inwardly toward each other medially in a manner preventing twisting of the straps.

Claim 17 (new) A tensioning device as recited in claim 16, wherein the elastic member has a varying transverse width, the transverse width defined as the transverse distance between the upper and lower edges.

Claim 18 (new) A tensioning device as recited in claim 17, wherein said transverse width is substantially uniform along the middle region of said elastic member.

Claim 19 (new) A tensioning device as recited in claim 18, wherein said transverse width increases along said left and right portions in a direction toward said middle region.

Claim 20 (new) A clothing strap tensioning device, comprising:

an elastic member having a geometry generally defined by middle, left end, and right end portions, and bounded by upper, lower, left and right edges, the upper edges sloping upwardly from the middle portion of the elastic member toward the left and right end portions thereof;

means integrated into the left end and right end portions for enabling releasable attachment of the end portions to each other to form the elastic member into a loop; and

said left and right end portion of the elastic member projecting upwardly away from said middle portion,

wherein, upon securing the tensioning device about the spaced-apart clothing straps, the clothing straps are drawn inwardly toward each other medially in a manner preventing twisting of the straps.

Claim 21 (new) A tensioning device as recited in claim 20, wherein the elastic member is characterized by a geometry in which the lower edge slopes upwardly from the middle portion of the elastic member toward the left and right end portions thereof.